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A Woodside Reminiscence

By
Grizzly Ryder

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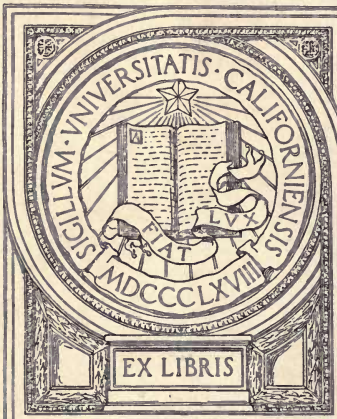

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ROBERT ERNEST COWAN

A WOODSIDE REMINISCENCE

AS TOLD BY

GRIZZLY RYDER

THE BIG REDWOOD

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THE BIG REDWOOD

A WOODSIDE REMINISCENCE

AS TOLD BY
GRIZZLY RYDER

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A WOODSIDE REMINISCENCE

IN THE year 1914, at the end of a winter's day in Springfield, Massachusetts, having completed the business which I had in hand, and not desiring to return to the home of the friend with whom I was visiting, at so early an hour, I wandered along the main street of the city, towards the outskirts. Seeing a sign "Antique Furniture" displayed over the entrance to an old-fashioned colonial house, I wandered in—more with the idea of escaping the cold air and falling snow than with any expectation of finding anything of particular interest.

As I entered, I saw seated by a stove at the farther end of the room, two men evidently well advanced in years. One of them came forward and in a very courteous manner asked how he could serve me. I replied that I was idly looking about and if he would grant me the privilege of looking over what he had, though I probably would not purchase anything, I should appreciate his courtesy. He immediately replied that I should make myself at home and returned to his friend by the stove.

I wandered around the place, seeing the usual assortment displayed in places of that character—composed mostly of old-fashioned warming pans, flax wheels, andirons, etc. Finally, arriving close to where the two men were seated, I heard the proprietor say to his visitor:

"Do you expect to go back again to that country?" to which the visitor replied:

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"Yes, I certainly do! I am going back just as soon as my wife's health will permit. I would not live anywhere else."

Without any ceremony, I broke into the conversation and said: "You are absolutely right: it is the only place in the world fit to live in."

The old gentleman turned suddenly and said, "Are you from California?" To which I replied that I was; that I was born there and had spent most of my life there. He said: "Come and sit down; I want to talk to you."

So a place was made for me by the fire and I immediately entered into conversation with the two men. The proprietor said: "This is Mr. Ryder," and added further, "he is commonly known as 'Grizzly Ryder,' from an encounter he had in the early days in California with a Grizzly bear. You can see that the upper portion of his ear has been torn away. I can bear evidence to the fact that his body is covered with scars from this same encounter."

I turned to Ryder and asked, "What part of California are you from?" He said: "I lived the greater part of my life in California, about thirty miles south of San Francisco, and I will draw a map and show you just exactly where my house was located."

He then took a piece of paper, drew quite an accurate map of the country lying south of San Francisco, and indicated Woodside as the particular locality where he lived. I became interested at once, on account of my own familiarity with that neighborhood and said that I would like to hear more about his early experiences. As I had ample time, he proceeded to relate the following:

"I enlisted for the Mexican War and after the termination of that, started west for California, with a man named Tripp."

I there interrupted him and said, "Do you mean Dr. Tripp?" whom I had known as a child, living in Woodside; and who had continued to live there until a very few years ago. He said, "Yes, Dr. Tripp," and continued:

"We finally reached California, came to San Francisco, which was then practically a bustling village, and as neither Tripp nor myself cared for city life, particularly as it was then being carried on in San Francisco, and realizing the great demands for lumber of all kinds, we decided to locate south of San Francisco, where lumber was plentiful, and engage in the lumbering business. We settled at Woodside, traveling to that point from San Francisco on horseback. At that time there was but one house between the Mission Dolores and the little town now called Redwood City, which at that time was called the Embarcadero—the name being derived from the fact that the lumber which was cut along the mountains in that neighborhood was hauled to this point where a slough made up from the bay was located, and was there floated down and finally reached San Francisco. The way we used to float the logs was to tie several together, launch them at the flood of the tide and they would float out with the ebb. We would then anchor them so that the incoming tide could not float them back, and so continue until we had reached the bay. Keeping close to the shore, we followed the same tactics until finally we would land our logs at San Francisco; at least, those of them which were not lost in transit.

"There were, at that time—or at least soon after—five sawmills located within a radius of two miles around Woodside, as there was plenty of Redwood timber to be had, many of the trees growing quite a distance into the valley. Tripp and I lived together and employed a gang of men engaged in cutting out piles for some of the San Francisco wharves, which were then being constructed.

"As is well known, that section of the country was much infested with Grizzly bears, particularly a little further south back of what is now known as Palo Alto. One morning we discovered that a pair of our oxen had disappeared—evidently strayed; and being unable to find any trace of them in the neighborhood of our camp, we concluded that they had strayed south along the base of the mountains, into what is now Portola Valley. There was a rich growth of pasture grass there and it would be a natural place for strayed animals to remain. We knew that there were many Grizzly bears in that neighborhood and realizing the danger the animals ran in being unprotected in that district, it was determined to go at once and seek them.

"I started out from the camp in the early morning, with a young Mexican boy, who was to accompany me. As we would have to search over a considerable area, we did not take horses, but traveled along the well-beaten trail on foot. It was agreed between the boy and myself that we should meet at a certain rock which was plainly to be seen and well known. The meeting was to be at sunset. We also agreed that if either of us found the oxen, he was to drive them to the camp without waiting for the other, and the remaining one, going to the rock as agreed,

at sunset, and the other not arriving, it would be known that the oxen had been found and driven to camp.

"I hunted about all day without success and finally arrived at the rock about sundown, to await the young boy, and remained there for some time after the sun had set, but the boy did not appear. I naturally concluded that he had found the oxen and driven them to camp, as we had agreed. So, in the pleasant evening air I started along the trail towards camp and I remember particularly, as I walked along where the trail turns sharply to the west, an enormous Redwood tree. I stopped and looked at it and thought that as soon as I had a little time, I would make some money by cutting it into shingles, which were in demand for the quicksilver mines at that time projected at Almaden. I continued along the trail a short distance beyond that tree, where there was an adobe occupied by a Mexican and his family. He also employed an old Indian woman about the premises, and an old sailor who had run away from his ship in San Francisco Bay. The old adobe," Ryder continued, "was built in 1836 and is now the property of a Mr. John A. Hooper.

"I went into the house and sat there chatting for more time than I realized and finally, as I got up to leave, I noticed that it was quite dark. There was, however, sufficient light from the young moon still shining over the mountains to make the trail entirely distinct and I knew that I had not a great distance to walk before reaching our camp at Woodside. As I started to go out the Mexican said, 'Ryder, are you armed?' to which I replied, 'I have my knife, but I have no other weapon; why do you ask?' 'Well,' the Mexican replied, 'you might

meet a bear on the trail,' but I said, 'I do not think there is any danger,' so proceeded along the trail on my way home. About half-way between the adobe and our camp was a little stream called, at that time, by a Spanish name which I have forgotten, and where the stream ran across the trail, the ground being somewhat level, it spread out and formed some little pools and it was at one of those that I intended to refresh myself with a drink of water. That stream is now called Bear Creek, taking its name from the incident which I am about to relate, and is the present source of supply of the Bear Gulch Water Company.

"I knelt down and took a long, delicious draft of the cool water and as I looked up, I could just see the moon sending its last beams through the Redwoods, before it set behind the mountains. Realizing that I must hurry, I arose quickly to my feet and as I did so, I perceived a large object very close to me, which I thought at once was one of the cattle. Lifting my arm, I shouted to it, and before I had time to make any movement, the thing, to my horror and surprise, arose upon its hind feet and grabbed me around the body. I realized that I had met a Grizzly bear. Fortunately, the animal was probably as greatly surprised as I was, and grabbed me quite high up about the shoulders, so that my right arm was comparatively free. I at once loosened my sheath knife and proceeded to plunge it into the beast. She then let go and struck me a blow. I say 'she' because even in those moments I realized that there were two cubs about my feet. The blow felled me at once and as the ground sloped sharply away from the mountains at this point,

THE OLD ADOBE, REMODELED ABOUT 1880

I proceeded to roll down a sort of embankment towards the brush. The bear pursued me, striking at me and biting me, but it was evident that the cubs, who also proffered their assistance, got in her way more or less; otherwise I never would have reached the bottom of the declivity alive. Although suffering great pain, I retained consciousness and thought of that old saying that if one will lie perfectly still, a bear will not molest one; so I made no outcry but as I reached the edge of the brush, I lay perfectly still. The old bear sniffed at me once or twice, then dealt me a blow with her paw and went away and left me. I lost consciousness and how long I lay in that condition I do not know, but finally became aware of a voice which seemed to be away up in the air, calling my name. I could hear this faint sound, 'Ryder, Ryder!' and just had sufficient strength to make a faint moan in reply. I then fainted again and did not recover consciousness until I came to in the adobe, with those who lived there about me, trying to do what they could to stop the flow of blood.

"It appears that the young lad who went with me in search of the oxen, got lost and did not reach the rock where we were to meet until long after sundown. He then hastened along the trail towards the camp and reached the adobe a short time after I had gone on. He left immediately and hastened after me. He had only gone from the house a very short time, when the inmates were surprised to have him come tumbling in through the half-open door saying that he had seen the devil and two bears fighting in the brush. The Mexican realized what had probably occurred and grabbed a lan-

tern to see if he could arrive in time to be of any assistance. It seems that the bears had torn my clothing entirely off, which gave the impression to the young Mexican that he had seen the devil. It is to the arrival of my friend from the adobe that I owe the fact that I am here at all.

"The first step, of course, in my predicament, was to stop the flow of blood, if possible, which was pouring in a stream from a gash in my thigh. The only sure way would be to sew up the wound. The sailor said he had a sail needle and if they would give him some string, he would sew it up. The string was found and he proceeded to carry out what he had proposed. Of course, he sewed over and over, as you would a sail, and each time the needle went in, I thought it was going clean through my body and coming out on the other side. Even with his crude implement he made a successful job of it and the bleeding was stopped. In the meantime, the old Indian woman had gone out and found some herbs with which she was familiar, which she proceeded to steep. Some of them were applied as an outside poultice and some of them were made into a tea which I was given to drink. While it seemed impossible that I should live, for a time, on account of the seriousness of my injuries, I gradually began to gain and so, in time, from having to lie on my back and look at the walls and ceiling, I was able to get into a chair. Never will anything be so beautiful to me as the sight of the Redwoods which I could see through the window the first day I was able to leave my bed. The constant care of those who had so kindly undertaken the burden of my sickness gradually caused me to improve

and shortly I could, without assistance, hobble from the bed to a chair in one of the other rooms.

"One day, while I was sitting enjoying the scene through the window, a knock came at the door and in walked a man with a small box under his arm. He said, 'I am looking for a man named Ryder.' I replied, 'That is my name; what do you want?' He said, 'I am a doctor from San Jose. Some men in a logging camp wrote and told me there was a man here who needed attention and asked me what my charge would be for coming out. I told them, they sent the money, and here I am. I want to look you over.' I told him I would be very glad to have him do so and he proceeded to make an examination of my wounds. After he got through, he said, 'If I had not seen you alive, I would not believe that it was possible. I find you in very good condition with the exception of that leg which, owing to the injury of the thigh and the impossibility of your receiving proper medical attention, will have to come off, and I shall proceed to amputate it at once.' I said, 'Well, Doctor, this is a great surprise and shock to me and I wish you would give me half an hour to think the situation over and prepare myself, and if you will go into the other room where the family are, and give me that time, I shall be ready for you.' I made up my mind at once that I was not going to submit to any operation. If I was going to live, I was going to live; and if I was going to die, I was going to die; but in either case it would be with all my arms and legs. I realized, however, that I was helpless and could not prevent the doctor from doing what he thought was necessary, so I attracted the attention of one of the children playing outside and when

the lad came in, I told him to take a horse and go up to the camp and tell two men whose names I gave him, to come at once and bring their guns with them. As you can well understand, we had various kinds of people in our camp and some of them were rather desperate. The two I had sent for were desperadoes, but very good friends of mine. It was a great relief to me when I heard the sound of horses outside and the two men came in. I told them the circumstances; that I did not want to be operated on; that I would not have my leg amputated and I wanted them to insist (by force, if necessary) upon the doctor's going away and leaving me alone. They said they would do as I wished in the matter. I then called out and told the doctor I was ready to see him and when he came in, I told him I would not be operated on. He said, 'Yes, you will; you'll do as I tell you.' I said, 'No, I will not. My mother's son is not going to either live or die without all the arms and legs which God originally gave him and here are two friends of mine who are going to see that you do as I tell you.' The doctor looked at the two men and they said yes, that I was right. He saw at once that it would be useless to use either force or argument. He then said, 'Well, if you want to be a damn fool, you will die, and that's the end of it. I have done what I agreed to and I am through.' He then went out and mounted his horse, and that was the last I ever saw of him.

"I continued to improve, though slowly; gradually recovered entirely and while I have only half an ear on one side of my head, I still am hale and hearty and would be entirely happy if I could only go back to California."

I then asked, "How old are you, Mr. Ryder?"

"Well," he said, "I say I am eighty-two but my sister says I am eighty-three and perhaps she knows better than I do."

With that he stood up, threw back his shoulders, showing a fine erect build of a man who was good for many rough storms yet. He said further, "You say you are going back to California tonight?"

I said, "Yes, I am taking the night train."

He said, "You tell Dr. Tripp that he has a turkey oil stone belonging to me; I wish he would send it to me."

I agreed to carry the message and the day after I arrived at my home, not far from Woodside, I drove out to Dr. Tripp's old store, which he has occupied for so many years, and said, "Doctor, do you know a man named Ryder?"

He said, "Grizzly Ryder?"

I said, "That is what he is called."

He said, "I came to this country with him after we had gone through the Mexican War together."

I said, "How about that bear story?"

The doctor said, "True, every word of it, as is every other statement that Ryder would make."

I said, "Doctor, Ryder told me to tell you to send him that turkey oil stone you have of his."

The doctor laughed and said, "That's right, too. I have it and will send it to him within a day or two."

This is the story of how the stream which furnishes the supply of water to people living in and about Atherton and Menlo Park Districts received the name of "Bear Creek."

Regarding Ryder, I saw, about 1917, an item in the

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San Francisco *Chronicle*, giving a short history of his life and saying that he had died at the home of a daughter in Brooklyn, New York, so evidently he never had his wish fulfilled of again seeing California, the country which he loved so well.

CUTLER L. BONESTELL.

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